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ABSTRACT

The cultural approach to the teaching of social studies program for the seventh grade level was developed by the teachers of Montgomery, Alabama under an ESEA Title III grant. Major objectives of the program are to stimulate students to develop an awareness of their place in history by studying the cultures preceding them, and to encourage students to develop a method of analyzing cultures which would enable them to systematically appraise any society. Each student is provided with a student learning unit containing many resource materials. After gathering data through the use of readings and audio-visual materials, the student interprets and uses the data in many activities such as simulations, individual research, oral reports, and dramatic presentations. The curriculum begins with a study of the culture, community and history of Montgomery, Alabama, and then takes up tribal man and proceeds chronologically from that time forward. All major world cultures are included. The method of analyzing each culture, a three-step process, involves the student in locating the culture geographically and placing it in a time perspective, overviewing the culture and determining its principal characteristics and unique qualities, and examining the social, economic, political, religious, aesthetic, and intellectual aspects of the culture. Evaluation results indicate a larger gain in social studies knowledge for cultural approach students. (Author/RM)

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A Cultural Approach to the Teaching of Social Studies

From ancient Mesopotamia to modern Montgomery, Alabama, is a long way--intellectually as well as geographically. But seventh graders in the Montgomery school system are involved in a program which is helping to make that distance a little shorter. The program, "A Cultural Approach to the Teaching of Social Studies," has been taught for three years; during this time nearly 2,500 students in ten junior high schools have participated in the program.

The Montgomery program had its beginning several years ago, when social studies teachers in the school system were asked to evaluate the curriculum then being used. Many of the teachers voiced dissatisfaction with the curriculum and expressed their belief that the program could be upgraded. They were primarily concerned with making social studies a more meaningful and involving experience for the students. They wanted a new curriculum and a new approach.

How does a group of social studies teachers go about developing a new curriculum? In Montgomery they began by enlisting the assistance of Dr. Oliver Ivey, Professor Emeritus from Auburn University. Dr. Ivey and Frances Cantel, Supervisor of Social Studies for Montgomery Public Schools, drew up a proposal for a new seventh grade social studies curriculum which would be used by all the junior high schools in the system. The approach they proposed was a study by culture study of human history, from tribal man to modern man. They chose the seventh grade level because every seventh grade child is required to take social studies and because they felt it was an appropriate grade level for introducing youngsters to cultural concepts.

On the basis of the proposal, the Montgomery school system was awarded an Elementary and Secondary Education Act Title III grant. So in 1970 the social studies teachers of Montgomery had a grant and a general proposal, but they were a long way from the "cultural approach" program they use today.

SUMMER INSTUTUTE FOR TEACHERS

The first step in developing the program was taken in the summer of 1970 when the 15 seventh-grade teachers who taught social studies in the Montgomery schools participated in an eight-week institute. Compensation for the teachers was paid by grant funds.

During the first two weeks of the institute, directed by Dr. Ivey, the teachers laid the groundwork for the program by defining two major objectives: 1) to stimulate students to develop an awareness of their place in history by studying the cultures which have preceded them and 2) to encourage students to develop a method of analyzing cultures which would enable them to systematically appraise any society.

The approach to the study of culture in the new program was designed by Dr. Ivey. In this approach cultures are studied one at a time in a chronological sequence. All the major world cultures are included in the curriculum so students will get a broad overview of the history of civilization.

The curriculum begins with the culture which is most familiar to students--the culture of Montgomery, Alabama. Teachers felt the students would become interested in the program and gain a better understanding of it if they began with their own community and its history. After exploring Montgomery culture, the curriculum then takes up tribal man and proceeds chronologically from that time forward. Although the jump from Montgomery culture to tribal man may seem disturbing, teachers find it useful to have students compare themselves, their needs, and their activities with tribal man. In this comparison students begin to see some of the similarities of all cultures.

The curriculum outline developed in the first summer institute is as follows:

Unit I. Introduction to "The Cultural Approach"

Unit II. Developmental Stage of Civilization

Unit III. Classical Stage of Civilization

Unit IV. Intermediate Stage of Civilization

Unit V. Modern Stage of Civilization

Having developed a curriculum outline, the teachers were ready to tackle the second objective: providing the students with a method of analyzing culture. They wanted a method that would be applicable to all cultures and help students see a broad view of a culture, but one that would also enable the students to "get inside" a culture and explore what life was like for its citizens.

The method of analysis that the teachers developed is a three-step process. When approaching a new culture, the first step is to locate the culture geographically and to place it in a time perspective. The second step is to get an overview of the culture, to determine its principle characteristics and its unique qualities. The final step is to examine the details of life in the culture. This detailed examination is made by studying aspects of six human activities:

Social--family, tribe, marriage, home, festivals, recreation, class...
Economic--market, labor, contract, production, ownership, commerce...
Political--state, government, legislative, executive, judicial...
Religious--church, sacred writings, ritual, ethics, congregation...
Aesthetic--arts, architecture, dance, drama, crafts, music, painting...
Intellectual--school, science, technology, literature, communication...

When teachers had determined the basic curriculum and the method of analysis they had the foundation for the "cultural approach." The remainder of the first summer institute was spent planning and organizing materials and activities which would be used in the classroom.

DEVELOPING MATERIALS

Teachers agreed early in the program development that a single textbook would not be appropriate for their curriculum. They felt students needed to draw on many sources in their study of culture. With the guidance of Dr. Andrew Weaver from Auburn University, the teachers undertook the task of developing Student Learning Units (S.L.U.) which would be based on many resource materials. The S.L.U.s were subsequently printed and made available to every seventh grader in the program for classroom use.

There are five S.L.U.s, corresponding with the five major divisions of the curriculum outline shown above. Within an S.L.U. each culture is considered individually. The study of a culture begins with geographic and time-line data. Next an overview of the culture is presented. The culture is then examined in terms of the six human activities.

In developing the S.L.U.s the teachers drew on a large number of resource materials. A bibliography of the sources used is available from the Montgomery Public Schools. In addition to the S.L.U.s, a library of supplementary sources has been provided for each classroom. Students are encouraged to draw on these materials in preparing their class assignments.

The production of map sets has been important to the program. A local art teacher prepared a set of acetate transparencies for use with each culture. Each set includes the basic map of the civilization on heavy acetate; lighter overlays show changes in boundaries that occurred as the civilization progressed.

Every teacher receives a master set of slides for each culture. These slides are used in the study of the aesthetic activities of the culture and show important works of art and architecture. Slides were made by photographing pictures from books and are accompanied by information about each picture.

Each classroom is equipped with a listening station and six headphones. A set of tapes, developed for use in the stations, is used to supplement the students' reading. For example, there are recordings of music played on instruments that were popular in certain civilizations. Another set of tapes is designed to help students who are slow readers. Tapes of a teacher reading the overview material from the S.L.U.s allow the student to hear the material as he reads it.

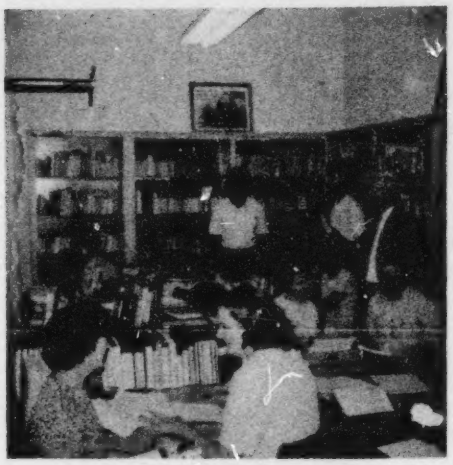
Developing the material for the "cultural approach" program occupied much of the teachers' time in three summer institutes. The materials produced in the first institute were field-tested during the following school year. At the end of the year the materials were evaluated by each teacher and revisions of the materials were made in the second institute. The third institute was devoted to preparing additional materials and activities. During the 1973 institute, the results of the three years of preparation were displayed at a drive-in conference attended by 125 teachers from the state of Alabama.

THE CULTURAL APPROACH IN THE CLASSROOM

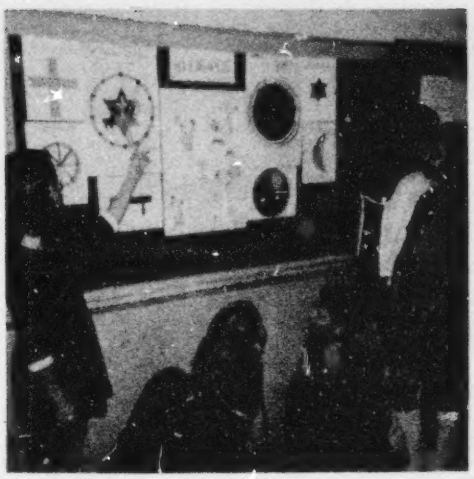
To understand how the cultural approach is used in the classroom we can follow the curriculum for the Egyptian civilization. The first task the students have when beginning their study of ancient Egypt is to locate the civilization geographically. Each student is provided with a grid and a piece of tracing paper. Following the directions of the teacher, who shows a transparency map of Egypt on the overhead projector, students draw a map of the country by locating points of reference on the grid. From this activity the students learn the geographical boundaries of the country and its relationship to surrounding areas such as Arabia and the Mediterranean. Students also study the topographical features of the land to evaluate the natural resources and protection which were available to the Egyptians.

Students then place the Egyptian civilization within a time frame. On a time line chart posted in the classroom, students indicate the period of 5,000

Bulletin board showing time line.



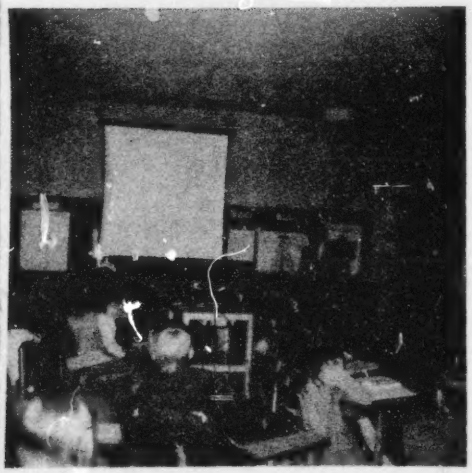
Summer teacher workshop.



Student report on religious symbols.

Student demonstrating Egyptian embalming.

Spring exhibit.



Resource speaker shows slides of India.

B.C. to 3,000 B.C. as the time span of the culture. As the school year progresses students can see the time relationship of various civilizations by studying the time line chart.

Information in the Student Learning Unit provides the youngsters with an overview of the Egyptian culture. Students learn that Egypt flourished in an area with "good natural protection and developed a way of life unusually resistant to change." They learn that the Egyptian people probably had the first true civilization and consequently had no previous experiences to draw upon in setting up their institutions. Students are cautioned to consider this limitation in their judgment of the civilization. The Egyptian culture is visually summarized for the students in the drawing shown below.

When students have a broad perspective of ancient Egypt, they begin their detailed study of the activities of the people who lived in the culture. They study the political system first, learning about the theocratic form of government and the role of the ruling pharaohs. To understand how the system worked, some classes have set up a class government based on the Egyptian model. One student imagined he was a newspaper reporter interviewing the Pharaoh Menes about military operations in lower Egypt and wrote a news release based on the interview.

Religion in ancient Egypt is examined. Students study the general concepts of polytheism and monotheism and read excerpts from Egyptian religious writings. One group of students studied in depth the Egyptian practice of mummification and gave a report to the class on their findings, complete with a simulated demonstration of how the process worked.

Students learn that the Egyptian civilization was responsible for the beginnings of many of our present day intellectual tools, such as the calendar, geometry, and chemistry. Some students have prepared illustrations of Egyptian hieroglyphics and explained to the class how these early writing influenced our own language.

To understand the social structure of ancient Egypt, students learn about the matriarchal nature of the Egyptian family. They study the life style of the people, as displayed in their homes, dress, and recreation. A skit, highlighted with period costumes, was presented by a group of students to illustrate what a day in the life of an Egyptian youngster must have been like.

Economics of Egyptian life are examined in terms of the agricultural nature of the civilization. Students also learn that early mercantile and manufacturing activities began in Egypt. To better understand these economic concepts, some students have written research papers on the irrigation systems and the shipbuilding industry in Egypt.

Perhaps the highlight of Egyptian aesthetic development was the massive pyramids. Students examine the architectural principles of pyramid construction by building models of the pyramids with sugar cubes. Classes also study other aspects of Egyptian aesthetics, such as painting and sculpture. Students with artistic talent have produced original art work in the style of Egyptian artisans.

During the weeks that the students study Egypt, the classroom takes on as much Egyptian atmosphere as it is possible to create. Bulletin boards and posters are designed to highlight characteristics of the culture. The art work and models produced by the students are displayed. The net effect is to help the students experience some of the flavor of Egyptian culture.

The study of each civilization is concluded by students summarizing what they have learned about the culture on prepared summary forms. There are seven summary forms, one for the geographical and time structure of the civilization and one for each of the six human activities studied. Below is a sample of a student summary form.

Summary of Intellectual Structure and Characteristics
*State or Country*_____
*Time*____

Language	*Technology (Inventions)*
Education	*Philosophy*
Science	*Values from any or all of the above*

EVALUATION

Grading of students taking the cultural approach classes is left up to the individual teacher. Final grades are based on an A through F scale. In the summer institutes teachers were encouraged to use methods other than traditional subject matter tests to make their evaluations. Because the cultural approach is activity oriented a teacher has opportunity to see a student perform in many capacities: teachers can use all forms of a student's participation in determining his final grade.

Before classes began in the first year of the cultural approach, a random sampling of students was selected from both cultural approach and control classes. These students were tested, using an instrument developed by Dr. Ivey to measure social studies knowledge. At the end of the year post-tests were administered to the same students. While there was an overall gain for all students, the youngsters in the cultural approach group made a larger gain than did students in the control group. A similar testing design was used the second year of the program, with cultural approach students still showing a slightly larger gain, though not as large as in the first year.

RESPONSE TO THE CULTURAL APPROACH

> Thank goodness I have been 'in' on this. Never again will I go back to, 'read, answer the questions at the end of the chapter, test the following day.' How bored my students must have been! How bored I must have been!

This enthusiastic statement was offered by one of the cultural approach teachers when the program participants were asked to evaluate the program. Ms. Mantel, who has compiled these evaluations, reports that most teachers share this kind of enthusiasm for the program. They feel the approach involves and interests the students more than traditional approaches. One teacher felt that "...skills in critical thinking are more likely to be developed through the use of this method." Several teachers noted that the cultural approach has helped them organize their teaching not only in their seventh grade cultural approach classes but in their other courses as well.

When students were asked to evaluate the program there were some negative reactions. One dissatisfaction was the lack of a textbook. "Last year we studied by answering questions at the end of the chapter. I like a textbook," said one youngster. Another student expressed boredom with approaching every culture in the same way. "I don't think that every civilization should be taught with the six categories." One student said plainly, "I just don't like social studies."

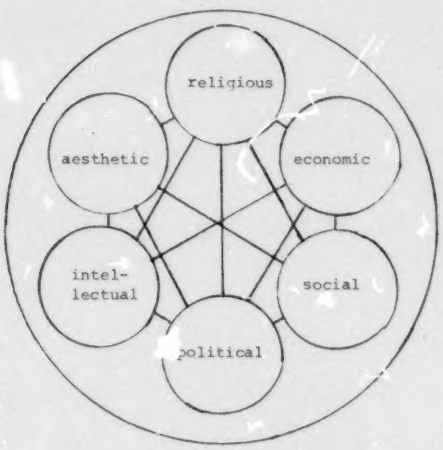
The dissatisfied students were a minority, however. A number of youngsters felt the cultural approach made their learning easier. "I like it because it is easier to study. The information falls into a certain category instead of just one bunch," said one participant. Another expressed the opinion of several when he wrote, "It has helped me understand the differences in my life compared to others, and why I have the culture I do, where it came from, and where it may end up." Perhaps the most succinct approval of the program was this statement: "I think the cultural approach makes me think a little harder and do a little better."

Parents of participating students have also been asked to express their opinions of the program. As with the students, there were parents who felt a traditional, textbook-oriented approach would be more effective; again these dissatisfied voices seemed to be a minority. Several parents reported that their children were quite enthusiastic about the program and often talked about their cultural approach class at home. Other parents were impressed with the use of multiple sources and the activity orientation in the class. One parent seemed to summarize the opinion of many in this statement:

> We thought your program for this year was excellent. Your students were encouraged to probe, study, and research on their own; and we can't think of a better way to prepare them for the future.

The Cultural Approach program which has been developed in Montgomery is complex. It has required considerable extra time and study by teachers. It has required students to think of learning in a new way and parents to be receptive to new experiences for their children. There have been logistical problems in getting materials organized and distributed; there have been problems convincing some teachers to adopt flexible methods of teaching and evaluating. Yet most participants feel the program has produced positive results; it has made social studies come alive and have new relevance for seventh grade youngsters. A program which inspires a student to write "history is not a bore any more, but an experience," seems to be worth the effort.

EGYPTIAN CIVILIZATION



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ED 073 983 - INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING: THE PROBLEM AND A PROCESS. SOCIAL STUDIES FOR THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. PROFICIENCY MODEL #7. 39 pp. Available from Department of Social Science Education, University of Georgia, 150 Rain Hall, Athens, Georgia 30601, $5.80. This module, one in a series of social studies teaching modules, is designed to develop an understanding of the sources of content to be used in an intercultural awareness curriculum and to reinforce teaching strategies by applying them to the development of lessons in intercultural understanding.

ED 073 015 - WORLD CULTURES. CURRICULUM RESOURCE GUIDE. 141 pp. MF-$.65, HC-$6.28. This teaching and resource guide, developed by the Hawaii State Department of Education, offers a cross-cultural approach, in the hope that students will develop an integrated world view as they study man and his behavior, groups of men, uses that men have made of the earth and its resources, and political institutions.

ED 073 000 - PRIMITIVE SOCIETIES, SOCIAL STUDIES: 6478.02. 40 pp. MF-$.65, HC-$3.29. Junior high students examine selected primitive societies in this five-week course. The concept of culture is defined and studied to expose similarities and differences between primitive and contemporary man and civilizations.

ED 067 348 - SOCIAL STUDIES: GRADE 9: ASIAN AND AFRICAN CULTURE STUDIES. 80 pp. MF-$.65, HC-$4.29. A framework for the study of non-western cultures, particularly Asia and Africa, is provided in this 9th-grade teaching guide.

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